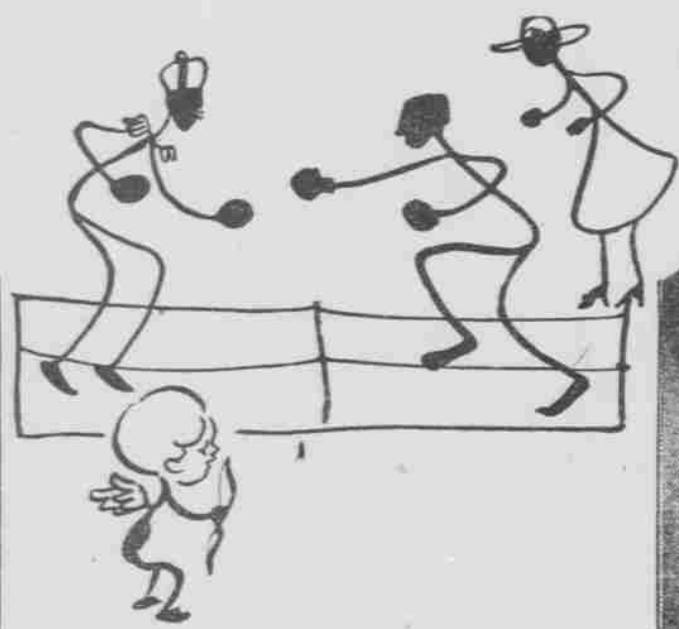


Last Gong Sounds on Katherine Elkins



The Duke of the Abruzzi, Who Remains Unwed Because He Cannot Marry Miss Elkins.



William Hitt, the Most Persistent Lover in America.

"Billy" Hitt Finishes His Seven Years' Waiting, the Duke of the Abruzzi's Disapproving Sister-in-Law Sails in Despair to Wild Africa, and the Rival Suitors Demand Decision

born an Italian, have such power over the happiness of a royal Duke and an American heiress?

The Duchess of Aosta was Princess Helene of Orleans, a member of the French royal family of Bourbon. She married the Duke d'Aosta, first cousin of King Humbert at the time that he was heir to the throne of Italy.

The then Crown Prince was delicate and had said that he would never marry. The haughty Helene was not in love with Aosta, her heart was buried in the grave of the English Duke Clarence, oldest son of the then Prince of Wales. Clarence could not marry her for political reasons. He died shortly after becoming engaged to Princess Mary of Teck. Helene turned bitterly to Aosta and married him, expecting one day to become Queen of Italy. And then the Crown Prince fell in love with Elena of Montenegro and married her. She brought a strong, sturdy ancestry with her and has presented the throne with several daughters and one son thus killing the Duchess d'Aosta's hopes.

If the Duchess had loved her husband she might have accepted the tragedy more equably, but she had married him simply to be made a queen, and in her soul she has always scorned him.

When the Crown Prince married Elena, Helene removed herself from her husband's apartment in the royal palace, and, when remonstrated with, said:

"It is now the business of the Crown Princess to provide for the succession. I shall not."

But when the first children born to the Crown Prince were girls, Helene changed her mind and presented her husband with two sons. There is always the possibility that one of these sons may become King of Italy, but it is so remote that the Duchess does not count on it at all.

Soured and hardened by her own tragedy, the Duchess vented much of her anguish on the Elkins romance. She seemed absolutely glad of the chance to ruin some one else's life, as hers had been. The Duke of the Abruzzi is her youngest brother-in-law. Between him and the throne stand five lives—the delicate little Crown Prince, the Duke d'Aosta and his two sons and another brother, the Count of Turin, older than Abruzzi.

It was no difficult matter to enlist the members of his family against the duke, and certainly these foes of his own household were hard to combat. The Dowager Queen Margherita refused to have the engagement mentioned in her presence. She has an intense pride of birth and in her innermost soul has never considered her own daughter-in-law, the Queen Elena, as her equal. She quickly aided and abetted the Duchess in her campaign against the "foreigner," as all Italy called Miss Elkins. Feeling ran high in Roman diplomatic and social circles. It was even whispered that efforts would be made to exile the Duke should he persist in his wild determination to marry the "foreigner."

The Duke never for an instant dreamed of offering amorganatic marriage to the girl he loved. He intended then, as he intends now, to make her his Duchess or to remain unwed. It is unnecessary to say that the Elkins family would never consider any other form of marriage.

All the interesting phases of the royal wooing are recalled by the calling of this last round. It is confidently expected that history will repeat itself. That during the next few months, with the eager Duchess safe in Africa, the Duke and Billy Hitt will fight to a finish. The Duke now has his brother, the Duke of Aosta, on his side, and there are rumors in Rome that the Duke himself ordered the Duchess to take this trip, so as to leave Abruzzi a clear field. If Abruzzi is to fall this time it will be because Miss Elkins prefers her American lover, rather

ONCE again the pendulum swings around and the triangular love affair of the lovely Katherine Elkins, daughter of the late Senator Elkins, of West Virginia, the Duke of the Abruzzi, of Italy, and Willie Hitt, of Washington, takes a prominent place in the affairs of the moment. Once again is Miss Elkins called upon to decide whether she will reward her American lover for his faithful seven years' service, or whether she will choose to become the wife of her equally faithful ducal lover. This romance, so gripping in its interest, occupies the centre of the stage, because the American lover, persistent to the last degree, has just completed his seven years' service for the girl he loves, and she must decide once for all which of her two lovers she will marry.

The whole world looks on, for this romance is known even in darkest Africa, and wonders what the result will be now that the last gong has sounded on Katherine Elkins.

The Duke of the Abruzzi, cousin of the King of Italy, is a lover that any girl, even the most capricious American heiress, might choose. He is no weakling, but a keen, clever man of affairs, a noted explorer, a gallant soldier and a man of the highest character.

His courtship of the charming Miss Elkins, which extended over five consecutive years, kept Europe on the qui vive, for never was a lover more determined to win than the Duke. Since the final meeting between Miss Elkins and the Duke, the latter has been proffered many royal brides. He has only recently refused the hands of the Princess Elizabeth of Roumania, Princess Patricia of Connaught and Princess Olga, of Russia.

These refusals are said to have made clear the Duke's intention to marry Miss Elkins or to die a bachelor. And that he means to try his luck again is proven by the fact that he knows that Willie Hitt's seven years are up, and also because his haughty, eccentric sister-in-law, the Duchess d'Aosta, who has done more than any one else to keep him a bachelor, is leaving for South Africa to hunt big game.

Therefore there will be no active enemy at work in Rome to keep the Duke from again pressing his suit, and he will once more go to the mat with Willie Hitt, the most persistent lover in America. Which will win? Abruzzi, hampered by the disapproval of his family and all Roman society, or Hitt, who has served patiently and faithfully full seven years.

Who can tell the mind of a maid? Not even Katherine Elkins's closest friends know whether she means to take advantage of the two years hunting trip on which her arch-enemy is embarking, or whether she will choose instead to reward her Jacob for his patient sowing and waiting.

No romance of modern times has so interested both Europe and America as this love affair which concerns an indirect heir to the throne of Italy and this most charming American girl. It began seven years ago, and it would have resulted happily long ago but for the bitterness and hatred of a most

unhappy and disappointed woman, this jealous Helene of Aosta, wife of the Duke's oldest brother, at one time direct heir to Italy's throne. The whole weight of her power has been used to keep Abruzzi from marrying this "daughter of a coal dealer." At first she had the help of the Dowager Queen Margherita, but in the end the Dowager Queen changed her tactics and practically refused to interfere.

Just what a sinister foe to her happiness the Duchess d'Aosta has been, only Miss Elkins knows, and she has ever refrained from talking about the machinations of any of the royal women who would not let her be happy. Seven years ago, when this romance was in its beginning, long before the public knew anything about it, William Hitt, son of the Reynolds Hitts, of Washington, added zest to it by falling in love with the girl from the coal fields of West Virginia. He gave the Duke no favor, but pressed him on all sides. At that time Hitt was in high favor with Senator Elkins, who disapproved heartily of the Abruzzi affair and who wanted an American son-in-law. And Elkins, and his son, too, encouraged Hitt to keep everlastingly at it.

Even when the wedding date was named in the newspapers, Willie grinned and kept on devoting his life to Miss Elkins. Not even the fact that the wedding cake, a huge one-thousand-pound affair, had been made, turned him from his course.

"Seven years will I serve for you, Duke or no Duke," said Willie to Katherine, "and then it will be for you to say yes or no."

But the Duke, in his turn, in the beginning gave the American lover no favor. He wooed Miss Elkins faithfully in secret from January, 1906, until December, 1908, when his secret was discovered and the dogs of diplomacy were let loose to thwart him. It was perhaps because he realized the part these dogs of diplomacy would play in his romance that Willie Hitt held on so tenaciously. He felt it in his bones that the girl he loved would not be permitted to marry the Duke, and so he waited.

And will the plum fall to the man who has played the part of the patient lover, or will the Duke, freed from the presence of his dominating sister-in-law, capture it?

Roman society, divided as ever in two camps, takes two views of the present situation. One is that the Duchess goes to Africa because she has relented and means to leave the Duke a free hand. The other is that she knows that Miss Elkins has decided to marry Hitt and so feels perfectly safe in leaving for her two-year trip.

"The Duchess must know that Miss Elkins means to marry her American lover," says one camp in Roman society, "else she would never go to Africa. She must feel perfectly safe."

"This hunting trip," says Washington society, "must mean that the romance is all off; let us begin to plan our wedding gifts for Willie and Katherine. At last the wicked Duchess has won her will."

But why should one woman, and one not



Miss Katherine Elkins as She Will Look if She Becomes the Bride of the Duke de Abruzzi.

than because of the evil machinations of her bitter enemy.

There is no doubt that to the average romantic maiden, the adventurous exploits of the Duke, his record as an Arctic explorer, as a soldier and as an aviator, must strongly appeal.

"He is a character from a novel," enthused one of Katherine Elkins's friends. "Why, oh why, does she not marry him in spite of the horrid Duchess of Aosta!"

Miss Elkins is to be in Paris next month. The Duke is also to be in Paris. "Billy" Hitt has written friends in Paris that he expects to be there not later than November 15. What will the result of this last round be?

The Duchess d'Aosta and Her Native Huntsmen in the Heart of Darkest Africa.

